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FULTON MANSION STATE HISTORIC SITE

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VISITORS GUIDE

FULTON MANSION

— STATE HISTORIC SITE —

Rockport-Fulton, Texas



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES

Welcome to Fulton Mansion State Historic Site. Rising above the Aransas Bay and surrounded by stately oaks, this home was progressive, luxurious, and rare for this part of 19th-century Texas. Today, the home built to withstand a hurricane has withstood several—including 2017's Hurricane Harvey.





OAKHURST

In 1877, George Ware and Harriet Smith Fulton built a mansion by the sea unlike anything ever seen on the Texas coastal plains. They named it Oakhurst because majestic live oak trees surrounded the property on three sides. The front of the home faced the stunning Aransas Bay. Extraordinary people envisioned this extraordinary building: George was a highly successful entrepreneur and Harriet was the daughter of Henry Smith, a powerful Republic of Texas politician. Together, they created a beautiful and comfortable home for their family and friends, decorated in the highest fashions of the day.

The Fulton Mansion was built in the French Second Empire style with a characteristic slate-shingled mansard roof. It was the only house in the region at that time to have gas lighting, central heating, and running water. A gas generator supplied fuel for the chandeliers and a central cast-iron furnace heated the home. Hot air was forced through a series of flues that ran from the basement to false decorative fireplaces throughout the house. Stored water in the basement was hand pumped to a tank in the attic and gravity fed to bathrooms equipped with flush toilets and bathtubs.

Along with these modern conveniences, the house was built to withstand hurricane-force winds. The basement and floors of the bathrooms and conservatory are made of shellcrete, a concrete-like material containing oyster shell aggregate instead of gravel. The upper walls and floors were constructed by stacking and spiking pine planks.



GEORGE AND HARRIET FULTON

George Ware Fulton was born in Philadelphia in 1810. Orphaned at 16, he trained as a watch and instrument maker and throughout his life patented inventions. In 1836, while living in Indiana, he heard about Texas' fight for independence and organized 60 volunteers to join the fight. Although he arrived too late to participate in the battles, Fulton still received a military commission. Described as a talented artist and an ingenious and very correct man, George worked as a teacher, machinist, structural engineer, bridge builder, and railroad superintendent.



Harriet Gillette Smith Fulton, born on Oct. 22, 1822, was the eldest daughter of Henry Smith, Texas' first provisional governor. In 1840, Harriet met George Fulton, the new local school teacher in Brazoria, Texas, and they married that same year. Six years after their wedding, Harriet and George moved to Baltimore in pursuit of better opportunities. Increasingly homesick, Harriet wrote, "Oh ... how I should like to take a trip to Texas this fall. (Texas, there is something fascinating about that name. Oh how I love it.)"

In 1868, Harriet received a vast land inheritance and she and George finally returned to her beloved Texas to oversee the property. Always ready for the next adventure, George saw the family's move back to Texas as an opportunity to add to his wife's inheritance of 28,000 acres. Within a few years, Fulton joined two associates in establishing the Coleman-Mathis-Fulton Pasture Company. Later, the company became a leader in the cattle industry, making changes that are still evident in South Texas ranching today. Bolstered

by their bright business prospects and their vast land holdings, George and Harriet began building Oakhurst in 1874.

While George Fulton's technological interests and talents were reflected in the construction methods and the mechanical systems in the house, it was Harriet who governed the home. She supervised the entire household, including several servants and a small farming operation. Gardening was her passion, which she acknowledged in an 1863 letter to her husband: "...housework is quite distasteful to me ... I feel sometimes as if I would like to live ... among the wildflowers, or in a green house, where I could watch, and promote the growth and improvement of every plant, the forming and expanding of every bud, from the most tiny forget-me-not to the grandest and most noble of flowers."

In 1893 at the age of 83, George Fulton died at Oakhurst. After his death, Harriet left the home and never returned. She reflected, "Although it is such a lovely house, I have not the slightest desire to ever live there again. The charm has fled for all time." She died in 1910.

CHILDREN AND DESCENDANTS

George and Harriet had six children — four boys and two girls. Of those children, two sons and both daughters survived to adulthood, married, and had children of their own. Their sons, James and George William, became officers in the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company. At different times, their two daughters, Annie and Hattie,



lived in the mansion along with their husbands and children. George and Harriet had many grandchildren and today numerous Fulton descendants live throughout the state and country.